1939

Who Hitler Is

Robert Charles Kirkwood Ensor

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Recommended Citation
Ensor, Robert Charles Kirkwood, "Who Hitler Is" (1939). Rare Books and Manuscripts. 22.
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WHO
HITLER
IS
By R. C. K. ENSOR

OXFORD PAMPHLETS ON WORLD AFFAIRS
WHO HITLER IS

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R. C. K. ENSOR

OXFORD
AT THE CLARENDON PRESS
1939
At the end of the last war Hitler, aged 30, was a lance-corporal in the German army. In 1919 he joined a little body called the German Workers' Party, which later became the National Socialist (Nazi) Party. In 1921 he designed its swastika flag, and became its Führer. In 1923 he was imprisoned, and wrote the first part of Mein Kampf. In 1928 the Party had only 12 seats in the Reichstag. In 1930 the Party polled 6½ million votes and had 107 seats. In 1933 Hitler became Chancellor of the Reich, and all the world knows what has happened since then. This Pamphlet is at once a short biography of the man who at the end of August 'decided for war, and signed the death-warrant for, perhaps, millions of lives', and an account of the methods by which the Nazi party rose to power and absolute control over the destinies of 80 million people.

Mr. Ensor has described the ideas at the back of Hitler's book Mein Kampf in Pamphlet No. 3 in this series, which should be read in conjunction with this one.

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In his broadcast to the British nation on the outbreak of hostilities, Mr. Chamberlain made clear his conviction that this was one man's war. 'Up to the very last', he said, 'it would have been quite possible to have arranged a peaceful and honourable settlement between Germany and Poland; but Hitler would not have it.' There is every reason to believe that attribution correct. At the end of August the final choice between war and peace lay with an individual. He decided for war, and signed the death-warrant for, perhaps, millions of lives.

Who and what is this war-maker? He is on any showing a very remarkable person. He has risen to power despite extraordinary handicaps. If any seer had predicted in 1914 that within twenty years all the chief Conservative elements in Germany—her Army officer-class and her landed aristocracy, her lower middle-class and her millionaire industrialists—would have combined together (with eager approval and support from leading Hohenzollerns) to give absolute power to an ex-working man, few indeed would have believed it. Fewer still if it had been added that the working man was not German by birth, but German-Austrian; that he had served through the 1914–18 war without ever rising above the rank of lance-corporal; and that in his civilian
trade, as an artisan working for builders and decorators, he had never been able to keep any position for more than a few months.

Antecedents and Youth

He was born in 1889 in the small Austrian town of Braunau on the Austro-Bavarian frontier, and spent boyhood and adolescence in other towns on the same frontier, where he was much nearer Munich than Vienna. He came on both sides from the peasant stock of a forest region, whose people are said to be noted for sturdiness and longevity. The father was a man out of the common. The illegitimate son of a mother of 42, he climbed at 40 into lower middle-class status as an Austrian Government official employed in the Customs. Thereupon he married his third wife; and to them twelve years later was born Adolf. He sent the boy to a Realschule—a secondary school with a modern curriculum—hoping to get him eventually into Government service. But Adolf was wayward and idle, and having a turn for drawing dreamed of becoming an artist. Before he was 13, his father died; and, soon after, he developed a temporary lung-trouble, which caused him to be coddled. For five years he lived indolently, working so little even at his art lessons that at 18 he could not pass the examinations to go farther. Then his mother died; and almost suddenly he found himself an impoverished orphan, who, through wasting his school opportunities, possessed no qualifications for any profession, artistic or other. He went away to Vienna, and became a bricklayer's labourer.

His early experiences in the great city were cruel. For three years he lived in a men's lodging-house with the lowest of the poor. The miseries and brutalities which he describes in his book *Mein Kampf*, he had obviously seen with his own eyes. Friendless and unskilled, he just kept afloat, but the premature harsh struggle made him a cynic and a fighter without scruples. In a world of knavery, where his fellow men fell into two classes—deceivers and dupes—he saw the advantage of belonging to the former. In *Mein Kampf* he discusses without compunction what are the best methods to employ for deceiving the public on the grand scale—methods which he and his movement afterwards regularly practised in the pursuit of power, alike in Germany and in Europe. They assume a complete indifference to right and wrong.

Politics in Vienna

In Vienna at that time, apart from a large body of Czechs and smaller contingents from the other subject peoples in the Habsburgs' dominion, two main races composed the population, German-Austrians and Jews. The latter were a minority,
but a large one. Their political expression was the Social Democratic party, to which they supplied nearly all the leaders and the most enterprising of the rank and file. Among the German-Austrian population parties rose and fell, but two rival political tendencies persisted. The stronger was Catholic-clerical and pro-Habsburg; the other, anti-clerical and Pan-German, hating the Habsburg dynasty as an obstacle to union with the Fatherland. The circumstances of Vienna made both schools anti-Semite; those of Austria made them both anti-Slav, and in particular anti-Czech. The 'anti' feelings were intense, the conflicts between races and parties resembling those in Belfast or Londonderry.

Coming from the west frontier of Austria, where desire for union with Germany was commonest, the young Hitler naturally sided with the Pan-Germans. But he thought that the 'Christian Socialist' party, which at that time ruled Vienna as the popular representative of the Catholic and pro-Habsburg element, was better led. He particularly admired its chief, the burgomaster Dr. Lueger, for his demagogic gifts and his zealous anti-Semitism. His own hatred for Jews and Social Democrats was nourished by early trade experience. He was working on a large building, when a demand came that he should join the Social Democrat trade union, and on his refusing he was thrown off the job. This happened repeatedly. Working-class Vienna was not a nursery of sweet reason. It was a school of violence and gangsterism, and the young orphan from the country marked, learned, and digested its lessons.

He was very miserable at that period, being conscious alike of social injustice and personal failure. Reared in a middle-class home, his idleness and truancy at school had cost him the descent to this proletarian abyss. The daily tragedies of slum life and unemployment tormented him. The more he witnessed, 'the greater grew my repulsion towards the city of millions, that first attracted men greedily to it, and in the cruel sequel ground them to powder'. In his twenty-first year he gave up working as a bricklayer's labourer. He took to painting and peddling cheap water-colours and executing architectural drawings. The income from these sources was minute, and in fact he lived by house-painting and paper-hanging. But he liked to fancy himself an artist, as indeed he always has. Accounts by contemporaries of what he then looked like describe a slender, sickly, aesthetic youth, very different from the heavy jack-booted hero afterwards idolized by the Brownshirts.

Why he is against Parliaments

His change of trade gave him more time for reading, and he began to explore the world of

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politics. The angle of his approach is interesting. From schooldays he had been a ‘nationalist’, i.e. a German race-patriot. And what shocked him most of all about the life of the Vienna workmen was that it rendered nationalism impossible. ‘The question’, he writes, ‘of making a people nationalist is before all a question of creating healthy social conditions as the foundation of the possibility of educating the individual.’ Before he witnessed a sitting of the Austrian Chamber, and for a year he did so frequently. This Parliament was elected, like the French Chamber, by second ballot, and in consequence contained a large number of parties, no one of which could have a majority. Hitler in his book passes severe, but keen-sighted, and in the main well-justified censures on that type of Parliamentarism. Unfortunately he did not realize that there were other types; and so he was led to reject parliamentary government altogether. His mistake was, and is, the one made by most of those Continentals who have abandoned Parliamentarism.

**Move to Munich**

At 23 he moved from Vienna to Munich. This city cast a spell on him which has never faded. It is artistic and beautiful, and its people, unlike the motley cosmopolitan Viennese, appealed to him as unmistakably German. Their accent rather resembled that of his native region; so that he felt more at home, though technically in a foreign land. He brought away with him from Vienna an assortment of hatreds—for Jews and Marxists, for Czechs, for city-industrialism, and, above all, for the Habsburgs—and also a hoard of observations and reflections on the art and method of gangster politics. But apart from arguing in cafés he had not discovered that he was an orator, nor indeed that he was good at anything. His life oscillated purposelessly between bursts of energy and spells of idleness, until the sudden advent of the 1914–18 war enabled him to find himself.

‘Finding himself’ in War

He welcomed instantly the fighting outlet.

To me those hours came as a redemption from the sorenesses of youth. I am not ashamed to say to-day, that overmastered by a storm of enthusiasm I sank down on my knees, and from an overflowing heart thanked Heaven for granting me the good fortune to be permitted to live at that time. (*Mein Kampf*, 181st German edition, p. 177.)

He had never soldiered before, having in Austria been excused service on account of his early lung-trouble. He now volunteered for the German Army, and was in its ranks for nearly six years. Although for exceptional gallantry he was awarded an Iron Cross of the first class, he was never (as already mentioned above) promoted beyond lance-corporal. Probably he was too self-centred and peculiar to get on ‘perfectly with either officers or men. There
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is a remarkable photograph, taken during that War, showing him in a group of seven 'field-greys'. The other six, laughing and joking, look much like English Tommies. The face of Hitler—grave, visionary, gazing apart into some indefinable distance—presents a haunting contrast. No one, if asked to guess which of the seven had a famous future before him, could fail to single him out.

Yet soldiering was really his native element. He feels and says so himself. Two utterances may be quoted in illustration. On the opening day of his attack on Poland (1 September 1939) he told the Reichstag:

I am from now on just first soldier of the German Reich. I have once more put on that coat that was the most sacred and dear to me. I will not take it off till after victory is secured, or I will not survive the outcome.

The other saying is recorded in the biography by Konrad Heiden. Rudolf Hess, formerly Hitler's private secretary and now his official deputy, having acquired a beautifully situated villa near Munich, showed the Führer over it. He remarked what a good place it would be to end life in, with one's dying gaze on the distant Alps. Hitler remonstrated sternly. The only right place for men like Hess and himself to die in was, he suggested, a battle-field. This temper, though it matured late, began early.

1 Adolf Hitler, 2 vols. (Zürich, 1936): the fullest single account of his life. Messrs. Constable publish a good (but somewhat abbreviated) English version of it.

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He tells us that the first book to interest him as a child was a popular illustrated history of the Franco-Prussian War.

The great epic struggle became my greatest inner experience. Thenceforward I grew more and more enthusiastic about everything that in any way was connected with war or soldiers.

The combination in Hitler of the genuine soldier with the gangster—the fighter on actual battle-fields with the fighter in the 'gloves-off' arena of demagogic politics—may account for some of his successes as a man of action. It is an unusual combination; though it is perhaps not fanciful to see some parallels in the career of Julius Caesar. Hitler differs from Caesar in that he has never commanded armies from the top; and instead of being an aristocrat who patronized and exploited the discontents of the poor, he is a man of humble origin who once drank the dregs of poverty in his own person.

The Militarists' Man

But the important thing to grasp here is his relation to German militarism. In the public life of his country he has always been the militarists' man. At every stage in his rise from 1919 onward it was they who kept pushing him up.

1 Though it is said—and may be true—that the success of the Polish campaign was largely due to strategic policies, which he imposed on his generals against their will. Already in 1938 a member of the General Staff complained privately that he harangued it on strategy at its own head-quarters.
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In 1916 he was severely wounded on the Somme. On discharge from hospital he was sent to a reserve battalion, but applied for and obtained his immediate return to his comrades at the front. In October, 1918, he was badly affected and temporarily blinded by British mustard-gas near Ypres. Again he went to hospital; and was still there, too blind to read newspapers, when the German revolution broke out and the war ended. When later he was again discharged, he had no home to go to; even his sisters had long lost touch with him. Therefore he went to the reserve battalion of his regiment, at Traunstein in Bavaria, and continued his service in the Army. It was then on the way to be transformed from a conscript to a professional organization—the Reichswehr, as eventually sanctioned by the Treaty of Versailles.

Politics of the Reichswehr

What were the politics of the Reichswehr in 1919? Was it a non-partisan Army, loyal to the Republic, or had it political aims of its own? Unquestionably it had. True, it had cast off the Hohenzollerns, and in April–May, 1919, it supported the Republic's Socialist Government against the revolt of the Communists and Minority Socialists. But at heart it was a counter-revolutionary body. Not the generals so much, but the colonels, majors, and captains, who were the real powers in it, ill-paid and precariously serving, were the arch-foes of the Versailles settlement—not merely because as a beaten Army they wanted to reverse the record of their defeat, but because as members of the great hereditary German officer-caste they resented a treaty which, by restricting the German Army to 100,000 men, deprived the great majority of their fellow officers of military employment. Hence the systematic hiding of arms which ought to have been surrendered to the Allies; hence the organization of the then numerous 'volunteer-corps'—para-military bodies designed partly to increase Germany's war-strength, and partly to secure political power for their creators (who at need could always arm them from their secret stores); hence too the murder-plots which killed off Republican leaders—Kurt Eisner in 1919, Erzberger in 1921, Rathenau in 1922, and a multitude of lesser persons. The aim at bottom, beneath all these activities, was to restore a great German Army and re-equip the country to turn the tables on the victors of the 1914–18 war. The Republican Governments of Germany ought in their own interests, as well as in those of treaty-loyalty and European peace, to have frankly and sternly stopped them. But after Ebert and Noske had been obliged to lean on the Reichswehr in order to crush the Communist rebellion of 1919, they became the captives of their protectors. Neither they nor any Ministers after them dared either reform the personnel of the Reichswehr or put their foot down on its plots. That was perhaps the most
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fundamental reason for the Republic's eventual collapse.

In many places the local Reichswehr officers gained a whiphand over the police. So it was in Bavaria, and Hitler's career was made possible thereby. The story begins in May, 1919, when the Bavarian Reichswehr, authorized by the Berlin Government of Ebert and Noske, bloodily suppressed the Soviet Government that had been set up in Munich by the revolting Communists and Left-Socialists. Two months earlier Hitler had gone to Munich, and spent the interval—at risk to his life—in arguing for the Social Democrats and against the Communists in cafés and clubs. His real function had been that of a spy; and when the victorious Reichswehr set up a commission of inquiry to find who the most active Sovietists had been, with a view to executing them, Hitler's informations proved of great service. That, he says, was his 'first more or less purely political active employment'. His officers encouraged his desire to take up others.

Hitler under Reichswehr Patronage

The Munich Reichswehr was commanded by Colonel (afterwards General) von Epp, who became a great helper of Hitler's party. His right-hand man was Captain Röhm, afterwards chief organizer of Hitler's 'S.A.' (Storm Troops). Röhm was a desperado, already concerned in political assassina-

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tions. The Reichswehr men had been taught by the 1918 revolution that they could not afford to neglect public opinion. They discovered that their queer fanatical lance-corporal, who knew so much about the Munich underworld, had gifts as a demagoguorator. They employed him to lecture to the troops, and also in a Press department. They sent him to sample a meeting of a little body called the German Workers' Party. Hitler joined it; brought into it Röhm; brought in also Dietrich Eckart, a poet-journalist who supplied many of his ideas (in particular his theory of the Aryan race, derived by Eckart himself from Alfred Rosenberg); got himself made its director of propaganda; imposed on it a programme of twenty-five points; and in a very short time made himself its leading figure, attracting large crowds to hear him wherever he spoke. Till 1 May 1920 he remained a member of the Reichswehr, drawing his military pay. Even after that its officers backed him. It was General von Epp himself who, early in 1921 (at Röhm's request), raised and advanced the money with which the Völkischer Beobachter was bought, to be the National Socialist newspaper.

First Rapid Rise

For the next two years and a half his movement grew like a mushroom. It still owed much to the Munich Reichswehr, who procured for it the favour of the police. It was helped, too, by the contem-
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Temporary inflation and eventual destruction of the German currency. But its distinctive asset was Hitler himself. Released by his Army self-realization from the obsession of failure, the artist in him gave full rein to the performing instinct. He became not only a magnetic mob-orator, but an all-round propagandist and stage-manager of genius. He was endlessly fertile in little ruses and stratagems to render his personality more piquant to the public. Flags, bands, choruses, and pageantry made his meetings unlike any political meetings held in Germany before. In 1921 he designed with his own hands the swastika flag, and in 1923 re-designed it in better proportions. Meanwhile Röhm organized the S.A. on military lines, and already at the Nuremberg Congress of 1922 a mass of them paraded in steel helmets and field-grey uniforms. In the course of 1923 he raised their numbers in Bavaria to 10,000 well-drilled men, equivalent to a division of troops. In 1921 Hitler had become the party chairman and Führer, on the failure of an intrigue to shunt him and shift the head-quarters to Berlin. It failed, because (a) the party knew it could not get on without Reichswehr support; (b) only Hitler could procure that support; (c) he could only procure it from the Munich Reichswehr.

The 'Putsch' that Failed

How decisive was his dependence on the Reichswehr backing appeared in 1923, when for a time he quarrelled with them. The breach began in May, when for the purposes of an armed demonstration against the Socialists the S.A. (with the complicity of Röhm) seized rifles from the Reichswehr's armoury. The Reichswehr commander, General von Lossow, thereupon surrounded Hitler and his men, and compelled their surrender. Half-reconciliations followed, but in November, at a moment very critical for Germany, occurred the Hitler Putsch. It was a bluff that failed. Hitler combined with the great General Ludendorff to bring armed S.A. and some other volunteer corps into Munich to set up a revolutionary Government. Ludendorff was to be head of the Reich Army and Hitler head of the Government. They hardly expected real fighting; they reckoned that the Reichswehr would acclaim Ludendorff as their national hero, and the police would follow. Hitler had separately promised Lossow and the Minister of the Interior and the police-chief that no Putsch would be attempted. He then surprised them, and also Kahr, the Commissioner for Bavaria, at a public meeting; and making them virtually prisoners forced Kahr at pistol-point to join in the new Government. But as soon as he escaped, Kahr collected Reichswehr and police; there was a street clash; and a few shots settled the matter. Sixteen S.A. men and four police were killed. Ludendorff marched unblenching up to his enemy's rifles and was taken prisoner; Hitler fell flat at the firing, and in the subsequent
confusion fled straight out of the city in a motor-car without troubling about his men. His arm was dislocated. He was found and arrested two days later.

Not only defeated but disgraced, his first impulse was to commit suicide by hunger-strike. Friends dissuaded him. After trial he and three others were sentenced to five years' detention in a fortress, Röhm and three more to fifteen months. Had even this short sentence been carried out, Hitler's career might have ended. He resigned the leadership of the party. But behind the scenes almost every official person was ready to strain the law in his favour. His confinement only lasted nine months. During that interval the party fell fast to pieces. A general election reduced its representatives in the Reichstag from 32 to 14, of whom only 4 remained loyal to him. In Bavaria a Catholic Government had laid the party under a ban. He himself was liable to be expelled from the country as an Austrian subject.

Hitler displayed ability in meeting this situation. He had the courage to humble himself before the head of the hostile Bavarian Government, and obtain a renewal of toleration for his party and himself. He then summoned a monster meeting of his followers, spellbound it by a great speech, and adroitly used the moment of excitement to impose a reconciliation on the schism-makers. Thus in February, 1925, the party renewed its course. He had nearly

four years behind him as its Führer; nearly eight more were to pass before he became anything else.

His Change of Tactics

He had promised the Government not to make another Putsch; and this, unlike most of his promises, corresponded to a real intention. In the leisure of his confinement he had reflected much, and had written the first volume of his book Mein Kampf. It is obvious that to carry out the programme of that book—to rearm Germany and obtain for her by war vast additions of European territory—it would have been no good merely to jockey himself into office. He must first convert at least a large fraction of the German people to his way of thinking. That meant propaganda, for which he felt he had a genius, and not military dispositions, at which he had just proved so inferior to the Reichswehr officers. He determined to concentrate on winning votes and seats, and to seek office by at least formal compliance with the constitution.

Once having formed this resolve, he stuck to it. Events turned out discouragingly. For four years and a half National Socialism made little, if any, net advance. Germany had grown more prosperous and harder to agitate. He had to make the S.A. less military and more political; this brought disagreements with Röhm; and Röhm left him. The
rest of his turbulent lieutenants were constantly intriguing against each other. Partly to escape from them, he bought his now famous house on the Obersalzberg, near Berchtesgaden. It was extremely out-of-the-way, though well placed for a bolt at need into Austria. Here in seclusion he spent most of his time, some of it in writing (the second volume of Mein Kampf was composed there), but largely in idleness. At intervals he emerged to stage great party demonstrations and transact business. But he could not recover his 1923 popularity. Devotees of that period turned disillusioned critics now. People no longer stopped to look at him in the streets of Munich. When President Ebert died, the National Socialist party ran Ludendorff as its candidate for the vacancy; but though they were not his only supporters, he only polled 200,000 votes in all Germany. When Mein Kampf came out, its sales were small. For years it was reckoned a failure. At the 1928 election the party’s Reichstag representation dwindled still further—to only twelve seats.

The World Economic Crisis

What reversed this decline and sent Hitler forward to victory was the world economic crisis which began in the United States in 1929. Reaching Germany at the very end of that year, the storm struck her with more violence than any other great European country. Very quickly there were 3 million unemployed, including great numbers of young men—engineers, chemists, electricians, accountants, &c.—sons of the classes who had lost all their savings in the 1923 inflation. At this new blow, which made the sunshine of the Locarno interlude seem a mocking illusion, a large part of the German nation became almost demented. They turned to whatever in politics seemed bitterest and most uncompromising; and they found Hitler. The election figures tell the tale. In 1928 the National Socialists had polled 800,000 votes for the Reichstag; and if an election had been held as late as October 1929, there is no reason to think that they would have polled more. But in the election of September 1930 they polled 6½ millions! With 107 seats in the new Reichstag they jumped to the position of second largest party; and for the first time since his ill-fated Putsch Hitler took the centre of the political stage.

Hitler’s Second Rise

He was not the man to miss a flowing tide. And it so happened that he was the better equipped to sail on it, because in 1929 he had formed a new and lucrative contact with the industrial potentates of the Ruhr. The latter had a large fund for political purposes, and henceforward (with a break in 1932 only) Hitler’s party drew regular subsidies from it. That he had for their sake to co-operate a good deal with the Nationalist leader Hugenberg did not work
out to his disadvantage. At the same time his other capitalist subsidies grew. In 1930 he was joined by Dr. Schacht, who had just resigned from the presidency of the Reichsbank, and who obtained for him large sums from the Central Association of German Banks and Bankers. With such resources great expansions were possible. The Brown House at Munich was developed as a very large central office, filing the name and photograph of every registered member of the party. Hitler recalled Röhm to be Chief of Staff to the S.A.; and within a year that scoundrel of genius, with the mass of young and truculent unemployed to recruit from, had built up a militarized force of 600,000 men. Nothing succeeds like success. The continuance of the economic crisis, bringing the unemployed to over 6 and later to 7 millions, gave the Governmental parties no chance to rally.

Early in 1932 Hitler’s strength was such that at the close of Hindenburg’s first term as President he stood against him for the Presidency. On the first ballot he polled 11 million votes (against Hindenburg’s 18 millions), but on the second he raised his figure to 13 millions. Moreover it was he, and not Hindenburg, who carried those Junker areas of north and east Germany, where the old President’s own class held sway. ‘The Bohemian corporal’, as the Field-Marshal slightly termed Hitler, was displacing him in the confidence of the militarist Conservatives. The sequel is well known —how on 29 and 30 May Hindenburg drove out the Brüning Cabinet (to which he had owed his election), and substituted a Papen Cabinet, which had (though not securely for long) Hitler’s support. On 31 July another general election was held, giving the Nazis 230 seats in the Reichstag, so that they became far the strongest single party. And then, after three months, during which the President, the Government, and the public all began to take fright at Hitler’s continued violence, yet another general election was held, and they dropped two million votes! And in December at the State elections in Thuringia, hitherto a Nazi stronghold, the party’s vote was halved!

**How he became Chancellor**

These waverings of the electorate illustrate the distraction of the German people. In their economic misery they did not know where they stood. But Schleicher, the Reichswehr general, and Papen, the Catholic Nationalist, the two intriguers who by this time were rivals for the Chancellorship, thought they knew where Hitler’s party stood. Discredited at the polls, gravelled for lack of money (the Ruhr industrialists having temporarily stopped supplies), and torn by a schism between Hitler and his most influential lieutenant, Gregor Strasser, they thought it on the point of breaking up; and each wanted to annex as much as possible of its debris. Papen aimed to annex Hitler himself, and to do this he
had eventually to concede the chancellorship to Hitler. But he never meant the Nazis to dominate him. They were to be a caged minority in a Coalition Cabinet, which was also to contain Hugenberg, the Nationalist leader, and Seldte, the leader of the Stahlhelm (the Conservative rival to the S.A.). The Finance Minister was a friend of Papen’s; the War Ministry went to a general supposed to be non-party, the Foreign Office to a Conservative who already held it. Frick as Minister of the Interior and Goering as Air Minister were Hitler’s only Nazi colleagues; and Papen, nominally only Vice-Chancellor, expected to hold in the Bohemian corporal without difficulty.

Such were Hindenburg’s and Papen’s reckonings when they made Hitler Chancellor on 30 January 1933. How little they knew, and how little they foreknew!

The Nazi Revolution

Hitler went instantly ahead. He had promised not to dissolve the Reichstag; but on the strength of opposition from the Catholic Centre he persuaded his colleagues to let him do so. He promised them that, whatever the election results, the Cabinet should be unchanged. But he at once gave rein to a propaganda of unparalleled violence. Goering, who besides being Reich Air Minister was Prussian Minister of the Interior, proceeded without a moment’s check or scruple to Nazify the
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It would take too long to discuss how Hitler organized and riveted his despotism: how he abolished all save the one party and made himself Führer of the nation; how he abolished the German States, controlling their areas through officials directly appointed by himself; how he abolished the trade unions; how he put an end to the elements of liberty in German local government; how he brought the whole newspaper industry under a special control, which practically turns every journalist into a Government servant; how theatres, films, art, and broadcasting have been similarly Nazified. Nor can we examine his constructive internal measures—the relief works, the ‘Winter Help’, the Labour Front, the ‘Strength through Joy’ organization; nor the less direct purposes and effects of his persecution of the Jews; nor his conflicts with the Christian Churches, both Catholic and Protestant. In economic matters he benefited enormously by the accident that the date of his accession to power coincided with the turning of the world-tide towards economic prosperity. But he showed great sense in first carrying forward the official economic plans already framed just before he took office, and then entrusting his finance to Dr. Schacht. One has only to consider the many crank ideas on economics that had flourished in the party (and were present in its Twenty-Five Points) to appreciate his flair in dropping them.

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Continuity of Hitler’s Ideas

But the essential thing to note in his Government policy down to the launching of his Polish war on September 1939 is the unity and continuity of his main ideas. He had said in Mein Kampf that the Jews must be extirpated from Germany as being incompatible with his ideal of race-purity; and he has not shrunk from the most inhuman courses to attain that end. He had said that the first essential for Germany was to re-arm, to break all the disarmament clauses of the Treaty of Versailles, to make herself once more the military mistress of Europe; and that if the ex-Allied Powers were boldly defied, they would not stop her. He carried out his plan and verified his prophecy; and by August–September, 1938, the date that he had fixed for the trial of strength, he was so strong that France and Britain dared not try it. He had said that Germany’s essential needs were not colonies, or a Navy, or even revenge, but (1) unity, i.e. the absorption of the Austrian Germans; (2) land expansion, i.e. the conquest by force of sufficient territory in Eastern Europe to permit a vast enlargement of Germany’s homeland. His successive annexations of Austria, Czechoslovakia, Memel, and Poland were the logical steps towards realizing these ideas. Not till we reach his recent compromises with Soviet Russia do we find any divergence from the long-charted course. And it is
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difficult to suppose that even that is intended to last after it has served its purpose.

Gangster Ruthlessness

How ruthless Hitler can be in the pursuit of plans may be seen from his famous ‘purge’ of 30 June 1934. Mention has been made above of Röhm. On 1 January of that year Hitler sent letters of public appreciation to seven principal lieutenants. In one alone did he use the pronoun Du (thou), which in German marks the closest intimacy. That was to Röhm, then Chief of Staff for the S.A., which he had expanded to 3 million drilled men. Röhm was a murderer and a sex-pervert, but he made perhaps more decisive contributions to Hitler’s ascent from obscurity than any other man, and since 1930 had again rendered unique service. He had always viewed the S.A. as a step to German rearmament, and now he wanted his vast host to be taken over and form part of the new Army. The Reichswehr leaders opposed. Still a small body, they feared to be swamped; still class-conscious, they refused to acknowledge as officers and equals the ‘warehouse porters and fitter’s apprentices’, with whom the revolutionary Röhm had staffed his corps. The conflict became very fierce, and Hitler had to decide it. He resolved, as always at a pinch, to stand on the side of the Reichswehr. But he knew his peril; the decision meant extinction for Röhm; and Röhm as a gangster would not take it meekly. Whether the Chief of Staff went as far as conspiring can only be guessed. At any rate, Hitler got his blow in first. In the early dawn of that June day nearly all the controlling officers and highest commanders in the S.A. were surprised and arrested in their beds. Röhm and others at his head-quarters were seized by Hitler in person. There was no trial; they were all killed the same day—some out of hand, but most (including Röhm) by firing squads in prison courtyards. When they were dead, Hitler (following an odious but invariable habit, since exemplified in turn against trampled Austrians, Czechs, and Poles) proceeded to throw mud on his victims’ memory. The charge of sex-perversion, which he brought, was true of many of them. But he had known and tolerated it for ten years, and nobody seriously thought that it explained the massacre. To complete the kicking down of ladders by which Hitler had climbed, Schleicher and Papen’s secretary were also murdered on 30 June. Papen only escaped because he could not be found.

His Political Technique

Wary and ingenious as he is, there is something at bottom simple in Hitler’s nature. He sees political issues, as the unsophisticated see them, in black and white, not in brown and grey. He has surprised and baffled statesmen, both in Germany and in Europe, by straightforwardly doing what he openly prepared to do, and not (as they would
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Yet the evidence of his character was as plain to read in 1936 as in 1939; and had they read it and acted then, when German power was still not formidable, the world would have been spared incalculable danger and bloodshed.

Personal Tactics

Puzzles about his private character persist. There are psychologists who consider him a paranoiac. Certainly, when he lets himself go in anger, he raves like a madman. But he does so in order to achieve a desired result, namely terror. The baffling torrents of mere verbiage, which he emits at other times, have also, it would seem, their calculated utility. In daily life he oscillates between extreme energy and utter listlessness. He cannot stick to a routine, and refuses to let secretaries map out his hours. For days and sometimes weeks together he is as idle as he was in his wasted school period. It may be that such lying fallow is essential to visionaries;¹ and Hitler is certainly a visionary in his way.

In his bearing towards his fellow men he has changed very much. As an only son, his youth was shy and solitary. Down to 1914 he had many traits of an aesthete and a weakling. He has never married. In the 1914–18 war, when he was a dispatch-runner, he displayed great bravery, and

¹ As Wordsworth thought; see his Expostulation and Reply and not a few other poems.
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was reported exceptionally obedient to his officers, yet he repelled his fellow soldiers. But from the age of 30 onwards he filled out both in body and in character. He acquired self-confidence and sociability. He enjoyed taking his meals in a crowd; at the Brown House, before he was Chancellor, he would lunch in the large basement canteen side by side with the packers and porters. Even to-day at Berchtesgaden he likes to have a dozen guests and henchmen round his table—in curious contrast to the Italian Dictator, whose custom it is to lunch and dine apart.

Supreme Power

It may, perhaps, be said of Hitler as of Napoleon that he 'possesses ordinary qualities in extraordinary mass and momentum'. He sways the masses, because it is natural to him to think as crudely as they do. But of his force and mastery there can be no doubt. The Nazi revolution has thrown up a number of able men, and attracted distinguished outsiders. Some have rebelled, but none has ever been able in the Führer's presence to dominate the Führer. He has always led and not followed. As Field-Marshal Goering once told the British Ambassador: 'When a decision has to be taken, none of us count more than the stones on which we are standing. It is the Führer alone who decides.' The power of the movement has lain in his hand. Its responsibilities lie at his door.
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BY JOHN JOHNSON, PRINTER TO THE UNIVERSITY